some neatly made points, but will recognise them from regular 'reading of the literature'. We are therefore left with the question of why the proceedings of such meetings need to be published. If money must be made by inveigling libraries to buy alluring titles, at least the participants should be encouraged to make their written contributions more general and more relevant to the title.

VERONICA VAN HEYNINGEN

The Balance of Improbabilities: A Scientific Life

By Henry Harris. (Pp 245; £19.50.) Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1987.

There seem to be essentially two ways of writing about the history of science, either through discoveries and developments themselves or through the persons concerned with such events. The latter approach is often appealing because it adds a personal dimension and at the same time the reader may well be able to identify with many of the scientist's problems and tribulations. This present volume falls into this latter class. It is an autobiography of Henry Harris whose work on cell biology is internationally renowned.

From relatively humble beginnings in New South Wales, through a series of scholarships, he entered Sydney University where he studied the Arts (modern languages and literature) and then medicine. He found the first part of the medical course frustrating because so much had to be committed to memory, but was stimulated by Fulton's *Physiology of the Nervous System*, which I too found an exciting escape from much of the rote learning in the preclinical years. His dislike of memory learning stayed with him throughout his life, preferring a more logical approach which paved the way to his career in experimental science. He published his first paper in the *Medical Journal of Australia* while a medical student, and is now "heartily ashamed of it"!

The real turning point in his career came when he was appointed a research fellow under Florey in the Department of Pathology at Oxford. Here he first studied chemotactic responses in leucocytes but soon turned his attention to RNA turnover in cells, a subject which became a life long interest. His discovery that there was significant turnover of nuclear RNA was made some 15 years before the demonstration of heterogeneous nuclear RNA (from introns and exons).

His later work on cell fusion which grew out of his interest in nuclear RNA was to have important applications in many fields of cell biology, particularly in regard to the phenomenon of malignant transformation.

After a brief spell in 1959 at the National Cancer Institute in Bethesda, and then a very productive and happy period at the John Innes Institute, he returned to Oxford to take up the Chair of Pathology on Florey's retirement, and in 1979 became Regius Professor of Medicine, a position he still holds.

His life long interest in English literature and his wide reading are reflected in his writing which is always engaging and elegant. This scholarly and instructive biography is a delight to read.

ALAN E H EMERY

Advances in Human Genetics

Volume 16. Edited by H Harris and K Hirschhorn. (Pp 485; \$62.50.) New York: Plenum Press. 1987.

This 16th volume in the series of *Advances in Human Genetics* continues in the tradition of timely, scholarly, and comprehensive reviews of selected topics in human genetics. There are five reviews, three of which could stand alone as monographs and are worth the price of the book in themselves. First, 'Genetics of Lactose Digestion in Humans' by G Flatz begins by suggesting that lactose intolerance is a symptom complex of diverse aetiology and then describes the physiology of lactose digestion and its role in human nutrition. A distinction is made between high and low lactose digestion capacity (lactase persistence and lactase restriction, respectively) and their formal genetics are developed. Second, in 'Chronic Granulomatous Disease', J T Curnette and B M Babior used this condition to explore the role of oxidants in microbicidal activity and of oxygen radicals in inflammatory diseases. Normal neutrophil function is discussed at length as a background to understanding CGD. The genetic emphasis is on distinguishing X linked and autosomal recessive CGD, the relationship between CGD and the cell phenotype, and, finally, the cloning of the CGD gene by 'reverse genetics' with its implications for future research and treatment potential. Third, the real jewel of this volume is 'Steroid Receptors and Their Disorders' by L Pinsky and M Kauffman. This is the longest review and should be required reading for geneticists and endocrinologists. The ontogeny, physiology, and biochemistry of steroids, steroid receptors, and the complexes they form are elegantly developed as a background for examining discrete genetic lesions and variations in androgen resistance. The role that study of these conditions has played in elucidating normal processes is well developed.

The shortest review is 'Perspectives in the Teaching of Human Genetics' by R Davidson and B